

## ***Website Update – December 19, 2002***

Elevated concentrations of arsenic and lead have been found in the soils of King and Pierce counties. Air emissions from the former Asarco smelter in Ruston were the likely source. The Washington State Departments of Ecology and Health, Public Health – Seattle & King County, and the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department are concerned about potential exposure to people, especially young children. High levels of arsenic can cause cancer, and lead can cause developmental disabilities in people. Children under six are the population most at risk for arsenic and lead exposure because they play directly in dirt where they can ingest contaminated soil through their mouths and inhale dust through their noses. Ecology is preparing to sample soil from child-use areas – areas where children play regularly - in King and Pierce counties to determine the potential exposures. Ecology will collect soil samples from individual play areas at elementary schools, preschools, childcare centers, parks and playfields. The sampling results will be used to focus health education programs, and determine if some kind of action (e.g., cover with clean soil) is necessary right away.

Because of funding limitations, we are unable to sample all child-use areas. In King County, current funding allows for about 250 play areas within 100 child-use areas to be sampled. Ecology and Public Health sponsored three public meetings to receive community input on the child-use area study design. Following careful review of the information we received, we have completed prioritization of the child-use areas in the King County study. Sampling will begin mid-December.

For further details on the upcoming Child Use Area Study, please see the Fact Sheet following this announcement.